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ABSTRACT

The assistant principalship may not be the most productive ground for future principals. Assistant principals have traditionally been disciplinarians or building managers isolated from the realities of the principalship and the school's instructional program. Some researchers have advocated dividing the assistant principalship into two roles: one for aspirants to the principal's position and the other for "career" assistant principals intending to remain in that position. Many superintendents are concerned about some assistant principals' lack of readiness to become principals, either through their own failure or the system's failure to train them properly. Some school systems have collaborated with university departments of educational administration to provide "remedial" assistance to a group of assistant principals desiring promotion to the principalship. The remediation program described in this paper consists of extensive classroom training and on-the-job analysis. Regular and clinical professors instruct participants in various educational administration components and then monitor assistant principals as they implement training on the job. The monitor maintains exhaustive records on the participants' behavior and conducts followup sessions. Preliminary results indicate that the program is having a positive effect; the final evaluation will come when assistant principals are either selected or passed over for promotion. (9 references) (MLH)

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REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVENESS: A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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You cannot fly like an eagle

with the wings of a wren.

--William Henry Hudson

ABSTRACT

Numerous researchers are now considering the possibility that the assistant principalship may not be the most productive ground for future principals. Not only are assistant principals not being appropriately trained in many higher-education institutions, but they are being given less than adequate opportunity on the job to practice the requisite skills needed in the principalship. Some researchers have advocated dividing the assistant principalship into two separate roles; one for those who aspire to the principalship and the other for "career" assistant principals, meaning those who intend to remain in the position.

Many superintendents have expressed concern that a sufficient number of assistant principals are not currently "ready" for the principalship, whether through failure on their part or failure by the system to properly prepare them for the next level of administration. Consequently, some school systems have collaborated with university department of educational administration to provide "remedial" assistance to a group of assistant principals who desire promotion to the principalship.

This remediation program consists of extensive classroom training and on the job analysis. Regular professors and clinical professors provide instruction to participants in the various components of educational administration and then monitor the assistant principals as they implement the training on the job. The monitor maintains exhaustive records on the participants behavior and conducts follow-up sessions following the observations.

Research indicates the participants need several opportunities to become proficient with new learning. Consequently, the monitors visit the assistant principal on the job for one full day of observation every two weeks. Preliminary results indicate the program is having a positive impact; however, the final evaluation will come when the assistant principals are selected or passed over for principalships.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous reputable educational researchers have concluded that the principal is the key to an effective school. Principals alone do not have magic powers to create these effective schools, rather they have the ability to mobilize other resources: teachers, curriculum, funding, community, central office, etc., to assist in developing such schools. The principal, then, is the critical agent who gets things done. Most researchers agree that the principal determines the effectiveness of the school (Lane & Walberg, 1987).

The belief that principals are critical to school success is not new to the educational literature. However, the research evidence is pervasive; the principal's leadership alters the schools' effectiveness in spite of social obstacles, including the family background of children, socio-economic status, and other detriments to learning.

WHY THE PRINCIPAL?

Why is the principal so critical to school success? Numerous research studies have indicated that the principal is the most important ingredient in the effective school. As reported by Greenfield (1987), "until recently, researchers . . .have underestimated the importance of the school principal" (p. 75). One of the best known researchers of the effective schools movement, Ron Edmonds (1979), characterized the school principal as the determining factor in the schools'

effectiveness. His study found:

1. Administrative behavior, policies, and practices in the schools appeared to have a significant impact on school effectiveness.
2. The more effective school was led by an administrative team that provided a good balance between both management and instructional skills.
3. The administrative team in the more effective school had developed a plan for dealing with student's reading problems and had implemented the plan throughout the schools.

Brookover and Lezotte (1979) found "a clear difference in the principal's role in the improving and the declining schools." In the improving schools they found the principal to be an instructional leader while the principal in the declining school was more interested in "informal and collegial relationships with the teachers." Therefore, principals must assume the instructional leadership role as the main ingredient to a quality school. However, the principal is not the only person who must exercise a leadership role in the school. Recent research is illustrating the increasing need for assistant principals to exert leadership in the school. Traditional roles for assistant principals have left them largely isolated and segregated from the realities of the principalship. Assistant principals are often disciplinarians or building managers with little or no contact with the school's instructional program.

This program is designed to remove those barriers and give assistant principals the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to be effective administrators. After all, how can superintendents expect assistant principals to become effective principals when they have not had the practice?

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

DeBevoise (1984) broadly defines instructional leadership as "those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning." Dwyer (1984) includes "developing and maintaining an effective instructional program" in his definition. Manasse (1983) claims that "like high-performing leaders in the private sector, principals of successful schools have a vision of what their schools should be and of their roles in achieving it." Continuing, Manasse (1983) says, "The effective leader has the skills necessary to bring all the individuals and subsystems into congruence so that all work toward a common goal." Failey (1980) specified that instructional leadership is associated with assertive, achievement-oriented behavior in an orderly, purposeful, and peaceful school climate. A positive school climate is characterized by a principal who holds high expectations for staff and pupils, and who has a well designed instructional and evaluative system.

The term instructional leader clearly describes the primary role of the principal in the quest for excellence in schools. However, leadership alone will

not suffice; more is needed than a strong principal with concrete ideas and skills to make the ideas work. The quality principal must lead toward educational achievement; must be a person who makes instructional quality the top priority of the school; and, must be able to bring that vision to realization. Therefore, instructional leadership and excellence are inseparable and essential elements of a quality school. Probably more significant is the conclusion from research that instructional leadership does not require in-born talents, but skills that can be taught and applied.

There are several assumptions which are related to the designation of the instructional leader in a school. In order to develop a solid framework for discussion, these assumptions must be outlined. First, the principal is the specifically designated leader in the school at the building level because the principal is the most significant actor in establishing and maintaining a quality school. Second, the principal may delegate elements of instructional leadership responsibilities to other members of the school staff, but the principal ultimately remains responsible for the leadership of the school.

The effective instructional leader possesses some specific qualities and characteristics. These characteristics are illustrated from clinical and experimental research as well as from field observation of practicing principals. Duke (1986) summarized the practical instructional leadership characteristics and skills needed by an effective principal.

1. **Staff**--Effective principals actively recruit excellent teachers, provide them with continual staff development activities, and maintain a highly motivated staff. Effective principals provide opportunities for teachers to be involved in planning and implementing staff development activities, thereby motivating them to provide leadership to the school and making them feel needed and useful members of a professional team. Effective principals also realize that teachers wish to participate in a system which empowers them to make contributions and decisions concerning the organization, particularly as decisions affect their personal and/or professional welfare.

2. **Instructional support**--Effective principals provide support to teachers which will help them refine classroom management skills, minimize absenteeism among students and teachers, and involve the community as a resource for the school, particularly parents. Effective principals structure faculty meetings which are positive, productive, and efficient. Instructional support also includes maintaining control to promote an orderly atmosphere in the school and to avoid distractions from instruction. Principals should also develop systems for time management and appropriate record keeping; thereby performing their most important function,

instructional leadership, not busy work or redundant paperwork.

3. **Adequate resources**--The principal is responsible for providing adequate resources, such as learning materials and supplies, appropriate facilities, and skilled support personnel. Principals often develop creative techniques to circumvent bureaucratic "red tape" and obtain the resources that students and teachers need.

4. **Quality control**--Principals maintain quality control of the instructional program through supervision, rewards, and sanctions of the teaching staff. Effective principals convey high expectations to teachers and continually remind them of school goals, objectives, and the overall vision. Principals use both administrative monitoring and clinical supervision techniques to assist teachers and ultimately evaluate them. Student progress is also closely monitored through the use of test data, classroom observations, consultation with teachers and support personnel, grades, guidance data, and other pertinent information. Typically, this area lends itself to delegation to members of the administrative team.

5. **Coordination of activities**--Principals are responsible for coordinating the numerous activities, programs, and functions of the school to assure that the various parts operate smoothly and efficiently to reduce stress on the classroom teacher. For example,

principals provide the avenue for the sharing of information between classroom teachers and instructional specialists. Also, the principal provides coordination of purchasing instructional materials and supplies, textbooks, developing teaching and classroom schedules, scheduling outside resource personnel, providing opportunities for sharing among the staff, and scheduling extra-curricular activities.

6. **Problem solving**--Effective principals engage in trouble shooting to anticipate and solve problems in advance. This requires continual contact with students, faculty, and the community.

Therefore, these are the skills designated for the principal which must be practiced by assistant principals, if, in fact, school districts are to use the assistant principalship as an effective training ground for the principalship.

TRAINING

A systematically designed and implemented training program has a positive effect on practicing assistant principals who wish to upgrade their skills regarding the use of time, personnel, and resources in the school. The trainers provide ample opportunity for the assistant principals to participate in each phase of the training program and for the assistant principals to implement strategies developed during the training process. The training and implementation of the program are intense and individualized with each participating assistant principal.

The program consists of thirty-six (36) hours of actual instruction, with additional time for participants to implement and practice the training concepts on the job. The program components are spread over eighteen calendar months to allow time for practice, reflection, and revision.

TOPICS FOR TRAINING

Based upon the needs outlined above, this staff development training for assistant principals focuses on the following topics:

1. The development of quality schools
    a. School demographics
    b. Skills of a quality principal
2. Characteristics of a quality principal
    a. Management skills
    b. Instructional leadership skills
    c. Self analysis of skills
3. Time management
    a. Prioritizing
    b. Planning
    c. Public relations concepts

4. Interpersonal skills
    a. Needed for change
    b. Communication
        1. Verbal
        2. Non-verbal
        3. Written
5. Goal setting
    a. Developing the vision
    b. Articulating the vision
    c. Monitoring the vision
    d. Developing a mission statement
    e. Developing goals and objectives
6. Conferencing skills
    a. Use in staff development
    b. Observation skills
        1. Selective verbatim
        2. At-task behaviors
        3. Verbal flow
        4. Teacher movement
        5. Questioning techniques
        6. Classroom management

c. Use of objective data

d. Providing non-judgmental feedback

e. Promoting a helping relationship

f. Communicating during conferencing

g. Development of interpersonal skills

7. Site-based management

a. Collaborative decision making

b. Staff development

c. Parental involvement

d. Different leadership skills

e. Different management skills

8. Conflict management

a. Interpersonal conflict

b. Group conflict

c. Resolving conflict

9. Problem solving

a. Generic

b. Specific

c. Problem analysis

SUPERVISED PRACTICE

The key ingredient of this staff development program is the supervised practice component. Trained consultants spend time in the schools with participating assistant principals to provide intensive assistance and the opportunity for supervised practice of key training concepts. Assistant principals also have the occasion to use the consultants for both individual and guided reflection on the status of training concepts. Consultants formally and informally monitor the progress of assistant principals in implementing the training concepts. Typically, the monitoring consists of shadowing the participants and providing objective feedback concerning the training topics.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

This program has four basic objectives:

1. To provide a supportive, non-threatening environment in which assistant principals can identify and practice administrative skills,
2. To establish a cadre of assistant principals in order to share experiences, problems, insights, and solutions to common problems and concerns,
3. To provide an environment for continuing personal and professional growth through individualized, concentrated activities,
4. To provide specific alternatives to the traditional training for school leaders, and,

5. To structure activities in such a way that participants share ownership in the process and the solutions.

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of the training the participating assistant principals:

1. identify the characteristics of quality schools,
2. list the skills of a quality administrator,
3. translate the skills into a personal action plan for the school,
4. conceptualize and verbalize a visionary goal statement for the school,
5. identify and utilize time management strategies to more effectively prioritize and plan activities,
6. enumerate and demonstrate effective interpersonal skills (communication) necessary for a quality principal,
7. demonstrate skill in collaborative decision making,
8. design an action plan for promoting site-based management techniques,
9. demonstrate several different observation techniques and skills,
10. demonstrate effective conferencing skills, including communication skills and interpersonal skills,
11. demonstrate techniques for effectively managing conflicts arising between the principal and teachers, principal and students, principal and parents, principal and other administrators, teachers and

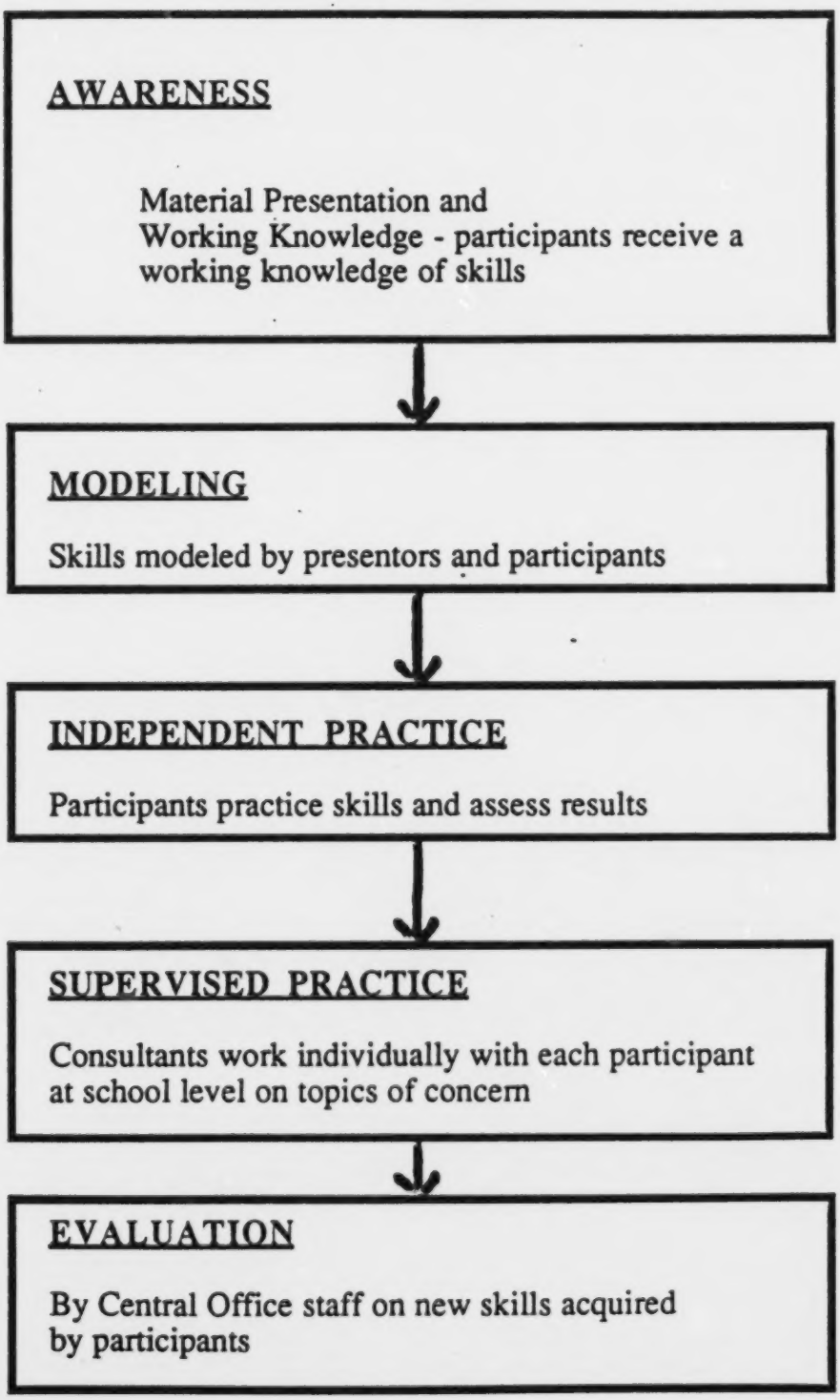
students, teachers and teachers, teachers and parents, and teachers and other administrators, and

12. demonstrate the ability to identify specific educational/school problems and methods for making logical and appropriate decisions.

TRAINING TECHNIQUES

Consultants use a variety of training techniques to teach and practice the concepts. Role play, simulations, video-tape presentations, case study, fact-finding activities, as well as analysis of oral and written communication techniques are used with the participants. The monitoring activities and supervised practice will be non-judgmental, with the consultant guiding the participating principal in a reflective mode. To be successful the training concepts must be internalized with both the principal and the school. Therefore, a non-directive approach is utilized with the principals, rather than a subjective, judgmental standard.

TRAINING MODEL



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